

intersection of computer technology and biomedical discoveries will doubtless lead to breathtaking and, at present, unimaginable discoveries that will enable us to prolong life, prevent disease, cure disease.

But the biggest problem we've got is the oldest problem of human society. First, people are scared of people that are different from them, and their fear leads them to hate them, and their hatred of them leads them to dehumanize them, and then that legitimizes killing them. And this has been a factor in human relationships since people first joined together in tribes—before there was any writing or any language or anything else. And here we are, on the edge of this great modern age, beleaguered with this.

And so I say to you, to me that is very important. One of the people at our table was telling me that she was a native of Sarajevo, and that these are old and deep differences here. That is true.

I do not believe—if I could move to Kosovo for a minute—I don't believe the United States can intervene in every ethnic conflict. I don't think we can ask people to like each other. I don't think that can be a requirement of international law or a justification for military intervention. We can't even ask people not to fight each other if one group wants to secede and the other doesn't.

But we can say that in the international arena there ought to be certain limits on this. And what is now euphemistically called "ethnic cleansing"—when you unpack it, what does that word mean? That means you look at people who are of a different—in the case of the Balkans, religious group, and therefore—and with a different ethnic history—and you say, "I'm afraid of you; I don't like you; I hate you; I dehumanize you, therefore, I can kill you; I can rape your daughters; I can blow up your mosques; I can blow up your museums; I can destroy your historical records; I can take your own property records, and I can burn them up. I can take the young people of military age and wrap them up and set fire to them while they're still alive. I can do these things because this is my land, and our greatness depends upon our ability to get rid of you."

And in the most benign form, "We'll burn all your villages and run you by the hundreds of thousands off your land, because we can't share this land with you, because you're Muslims and we're Orthodox Christians; you're Albanians, and we're not. And, oh, by the way, 600 years ago the Muslims came through here and had a big battle in Kosovo, and we've hated you all ever since."

Now, what our position ought to be in this is not that we're telling other countries how to live; not that we're telling them how—what their governmental arrangements have to be, but that in Europe—and by the way, I think, anywhere else that the United Nations or others have the power to stop it—we say we know there will be ethnic conflicts; we know there will be civil wars. There's a terrible regrettable conflict going on right now between Eritrea and Ethiopia, who once were one and then split, and now they're, in effect, having their tribal conflict over the border.

No one has suggested—10,000 people have been killed there—no one has suggested that some third party should intervene and fight both of them. That is not what is going on in Kosovo. That is not what Bosnia was about. That was about ethnic cleansing; it's a mass killing of people because of their ethnic and religious background. And if we can't stop that in the underbelly of Europe on the edge of the 21st century, then we're going to have a very difficult world ahead of us—because there will be a lot more of it, they will get aligned with organized criminals, with terrorists, with people who have access to weapons of mass destruction; they will use all this technology and all these open airports and all this other stuff, and these conflicts will not stay confined to the land on which they occur.

So this is in America's interest, but it is also morally the right thing to do. Think about these children who were here today. What do you want their children's America to be like? What do you want their children's world to be like? The 21st century can and should be the most interesting period in all of human history, in a largely, profoundly positive way. But it will not happen unless we find ways to deal with our differences which, after all, as we see in America, make

life much more interesting if they can be respected and celebrated but limited in their impact.

When there is no limit to what you can do to somebody else who's different from you, life quickly becomes unbearable. That is really what is at stake here. Yes, there are many difficulties in this endeavor we have undertaken, we and our NATO Allies, in Kosovo. And you may have many questions in your mind.

But let me ask you this: How would you feel, in this gorgeous setting today, with the birds singing outside and the ocean before us, in all of our comfort, if I came here asking you to give money to the Democratic Party, and I was having to explain to you why we were sitting on our hands and not lifting a finger while those people were killed and uprooted and dislocated? I prefer to answer the hard questions about what we're doing than the hard questions I would never be able to answer to you if we had done nothing in the face of this travesty.

But, remember what I said: We should have a higher standard for ourselves at home. Abroad we are simply saying, "You can have your fights; you can have your arguments; but we're against ethnic cleansing and the slaughter that goes along with it—and if we can stop it, as an international community, we ought to." At home, we have to do better than that. We have to say, "The differences that we have make us stronger, make us better, when we respect and celebrate them, but when we're not consumed by them."

And therefore, I want to say again what I said yesterday and the day before. We need a national campaign to protect our kids from violence. We will never get there unless we first of all teach people respect for one another and, secondly, find a way to connect with every one of our children in a very personal way. A lot of people are strangers in their own homes and they are lost to their parents, to their classmates, and to others. This is a very hard job.

And we will never get there unless all of us ask not, "Who is to blame," but "What can I do?" That's what the entertainment industry ought to do, not because any movie or television or video game caused those young men or others in these other school

killings to do what they did, but because the average 18-year-old sees 40,000 murders by the time he or she is 18, because there are 300 studies now—300—which show that sustained exposure to violence diminishes—and it diminishes one's sensitivity to the consequences of violence; and because we know that we have a higher percentage of kids who spend more time in front of various media and less time with their families, or with their friends doing other things, than virtually every other country; and we have a higher percentage of kids who are at risk. And we don't give families the support we should give to balance family and childrearing—work and childrearing.

So if you have more kids at risk, more vulnerable, and you bombard them with things that will desensitize them, you will increase the number who will fall over the line. It's just like the guns. The NRA slogan is actually, of course, literally true, that guns don't kill people, people do. That is literally true. But people with guns kill more people than people without them. [*Laughter*]

And again, I say if you have more—if you have more vulnerable people and it's easier for them to get assault weapons, or other weapons they have no business getting their hands on, then more of them will fall over the line and you'll have more violence. A lot of you have been involved in that, and I would just close with this—the Government has its responsibility in this crisis, too. And one of our responsibilities is to give both law enforcement and citizens the help they need by having sensible gun restraint measures.

There was a police officer out at the airport today when I stopped at the marine base on the way over here. And when he said, "Mr. President," he said, "I'm a police officer; I'm off duty today; I came out here with my family, and I just want to thank you for taking on that gun fight." He said, "We need all the protection we can get out there and so do the kids."

And all we've done—look what I've asked them to do. I've asked them to close this gun show loophole so you can't buy a gun at a gun show if you can't buy it in a gun shop. We've asked them to—and the Senate has

voted to close the loophole allowing big, multiple-ammunition clips to come in from foreign countries, and to raise the handgun age to 21.

We've asked them to strengthen the Brady bill and reinstate the 3-day waiting period. We've asked them to do a background check on people who buy explosives—which, after Littleton, you will see, is very important—very, very important—and do some other commonsense things that help us to trace and keep records on these weapons. This is crazy, that we would permit our society to put more children at risk than any other society in the world would when we already know we've got more of them that are fragile.

Now, we don't have to point fingers at each other. We should all sort of say, "Forget about who's to blame. We're showing up for duty tomorrow. What can I do?" That's what everybody ought to be asking. But the Congress of the United States needs to pass this legislation, and I was very encouraged that some of the Senators, after the American people expressed their feelings, have begun to change their votes.

But I want to see this as a part of our struggle to be one community. Most of the people—there was a great article in the Los Angeles Times today about a woman from Colorado, rural Colorado, who had her rifle and used it to run off wild wolves that were going to kill her livestock, and who felt so threatened in her way of life by all these city folks, like us, trying to regulate her guns. Well, of course, nobody's trying to regulate her guns—she'd just been told that. And if she needs something other—that she has to do a background check on, she's got nothing to fear.

But I understand, there is that whole other culture out there of people who are law abiding, they pay their taxes, they show up for duty when we need them to fight for our country, to defend us, to do whatever else, and a lot of them just think that this is some big urban conspiracy to take their guns away. Well, it isn't. And we all need to be talking to each other. We need to quit this sort of—you know, trying to make this chapter 57 in the culture war for someone's political benefit.

So I say that to you—hey, if you ask me, yes, I hope we get—before I leave office, I will be very disappointed if we haven't reformed Social Security, committed ourselves to pay down the debt over the next 17 years, reform Medicare, pass my education and my environmental agenda. But the American people will get the rest right if we decide to do what it takes to be one America, if we decide to do what it takes to reach out across all the lines that divide us and say, "You know, our common humanity is more important than our interesting differences."

And if we do that, then we will be able to lead the world to a better place and give our children the future they deserve. That's what I think my party represents. That's what I've worked for 6 years to bring to the American people. And when you leave here today, I hope that's why you believe that you came.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:15 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to luncheon hosts Irwin and Joan Jacobs; Joseph J. Andrew, national chair, and Beth Dozoretz, national finance chair, Democratic National Committee; Renee Mullins, daughter of murder victim James Byrd, Jr.; and Judy Shepard, mother of murder victim Matthew Shepard.

## Statement on National Crime Statistics

May 16, 1999

Today the FBI released preliminary data showing that crime fell another 7 percent in 1998, with an 8 percent decline in murder and an 11 percent decline in robbery. Crime is now down for a remarkable seventh year in a row. More community police on our streets and fewer guns in the hands of criminals have helped make our communities the safest they have been in a generation.

But tragic events like the Littleton shooting remind us that our work is far from done. We in Washington have a responsibility to support law enforcement officers and pass commonsense gun legislation. We should start by closing the gun show loophole that allows criminals and juveniles to buy guns

at gun shows without so much as a background check. In this way, we can keep the crime rates coming down.

NOTE: This statement was embargoed for release until 6 p.m.

### **Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Reception in Las Vegas, Nevada**

*May 16, 1999*

**The President** Thank you very much. First, I would like to say to Elias and Jody, we're grateful to be here, and thank you for turning the Muzak off. [Laughter] And all the televisions—I couldn't compete with them. [Laughter] And I thank you for being my friend for so many years, when I was up and when I was down, and for being my mother's friend, something I will never forget, and for having me into your home for the second time.

I thank Senators Reid and Landrieu and Senator Bryan and Bonnie for being here; and Representative Berkley, newly married—glad that Larry came. And your attorney general, Frankie Sue Del Papa; Mayor Jones; and former Governor Miller and his wife who, as of this morning, is Dr. Miller, so we have to be appropriately respectful there. Former Congressman Bill Bray, my good friend; and Chairman Andrew and Beth Dozoretz, our national finance chair, and her husband, Ron. And to all of you, my old friends in Las Vegas, and some of you I have not met before. I'm delighted to be here.

I was sitting here thinking—you know, I've had a rather rigorous schedule. Last week I went to Europe, to Germany, to see our forces who are involved in the operation in Kosovo and then to meet with the refugees. And then I had to go right down to Texas and then to Oklahoma to see the aftermath of the worst—the most powerful tornado ever measured in the history of the United States down there.

And then I came back to Washington, and then I came right back out here a couple of days later; and I was in Seattle, northern California, Los Angeles, San Diego, and now I'm here. So I'm slightly disoriented. And I was wondering if maybe Rich Little would

come and give the speech for me. We would never know the difference. [Laughter] And if you got tired of me, then you could hear President Carter, President Reagan, President Nixon, you know—[laughter]—sort of a little walk-through of American history. Thank you for coming.

**Rich Little.** Oh, it's a pleasure.

**The President.** I won't take a lot of time today. I enjoyed having a chance to visit with all of you in the line. I would like to begin with what is to me the most obvious thing about this day. I want to thank all of you who brought your children here. I'm delighted to see all these young people here.

When I ran for President in 1991, when I made the decision, it was, believe it or not, a rather difficult one for me to make, because our daughter was in the eighth grade, or then finishing the seventh grade. She was as happy as a clam and doing well, and Hillary and I were doing well. We had our friends, and I had been Governor for, at that time I was in my 11th year. And believe it or not, I was still having a great time. I loved my State; I loved my job.

And I decided to run because I was convinced that our country was sort of stumbling toward the 21st century with no governing vision that would create an America where every person who would be responsible enough to work for it would have opportunity; where all the diversity that you see so glittering in this room, all the differences among us would be respected, even celebrated, but where our common sense of humanity would give us a stronger American community as we grow more diverse; and where our country would still be the world's most important force for peace and freedom and prosperity.

I knew—I believed, and now I believe more strongly—that to have that kind of vision come alive in the 21st century, we had to be able to deal with what was going on here that is different. And what is going on here that is different? We're in the middle of the biggest explosion of technology in the history of the country, in the history of the world. We also are seeing the shattering of all kinds of barriers, making people ever more interdependent and drawing us closer and closer together across all national lines.